

Final Notes April 20, 1998

DECISION PROCESS COORDINATING GROUP
MEETING NOTES

March 4, 1998, 10:30 a.m.-4 p.m.
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE OFFICES
PORTLAND, OREGON

I. Greeting and Introductions.

The March 4 meeting of the Decision Process Coordinating Group, held at the National Marine Fisheries Service's offices in Portland, Oregon, was facilitated by NMFS consultant Ed Sheets. The agenda for the March 4 meeting and a list of attendees are attached as Enclosures A and B. The following is a distillation (not a verbatim transcript) of items discussed at the meeting, together with actions taken on those items.

I. Greetings and Introductions.

Sheets welcomed everyone to the meeting, led a round of introductions and a review of the agenda. These formalities concluded, Sheets moved on to the first substantive agenda item for today's meeting.

II. Status Report on the PATH Analysis.

Sheets said that, following PATH coordinator Dave Marmorek's recent presentation to the Implementation Team on the status of the PATH effort, the IT had developed some recommendations regarding PATH's immediate priorities for analysis. Those priorities are captured in a memo from IT chair Brian Brown, dated March 2 and attached as Enclosure C.

I think most of you are familiar with what we recently presented to the IT, Marmorek said. If there are any issues related to what was presented there, perhaps we can talk about them today. As directed by IT, PATH has now shifted its focus to the fall chinook analysis, he continued; we are attempting to complete that analysis by June 30, at which time we will return our primary attention to spring/summer chinook until September. PATH will be working on developing a process for weighting the alternative hypotheses; at the same time, we have embarked on a less-intensive analysis of steelhead, Marmorek said, in coordination with the ongoing NMFS steelhead activities.

We hope to pull the results for all species together by September or October, Marmorek continued, looking at what tradeoffs, if any, exist among the actions when the needs of different species are considered. Also, we have now received three of the four reviews from the Scientific Review Panel, he added; as soon as we receive the fourth, that review will be complete, and we

will be able to release PATH's preliminary spring/summer chinook report.

In response to a question, Chris Toole said NMFS is currently reviewing possible methods of placing the analysis of hydro effects into the context of some larger life-cycle context, for use in the steelhead Biological Opinion.

III. Schedule and Coordination Between PATH and DREW.

As most of you are aware, said Sheets, the Lower Snake River Feasibility Study is relying on PATH and the Fish and Wildlife Service Coordination Report to furnish biological analysis; it is relying on another regional effort called the Drawdown Regional Economic Workgroup, consisting of federal, state and tribal representatives, to coordinate the various economic analyses needed. This group meets every four to six weeks, he said.

Recently, there has been quite a bit of discussion about how DREW's economic work fits in with the biological analyses, Sheets continued. Obviously, there are some key interdependencies; some of the activities on the economic side depend heavily on input from those working on the biological side. We have invited several key DREW participants to today's meeting, with the goal of getting a quick overview from them on the current status of the DREW analyses, as well as what they need to know from the biological analysts and when they need to know it.

With that, Sheets yielded the floor to DREW chairman Dennis Wagner. Wagner distributed an overview of the DREW process, touching on the effort's background, study components, task list and information needs; this document is attached as Enclosure D. Wagner went through this document at some length; the group then spent a few minutes discussing the list of information needed from PATH. This list, including revisions agreed to in the course of this discussion, is reproduced below:

- ? 1. Boundary Estimates – Boundary estimates in terms of number of spawners, harvest rate and harvest for Snake River index stocks by five-year intervals for each of the actions -- Drawdown, maximum transportation etc.
- ? 2. Extrapolations – Estimates or methodologies for extrapolating from indicator stocks to all Snake River stocks. [It was agreed to develop an approach to extrapolating SARs for hatchery stocks with input from Hans Radke and the fish managers -- Don Beyer agreed to coordinate this issue with Steve Friese and Shannen Davis]
- ? 3. Downstream Effects – Upriver recovery has impacts on downriver stocks in terms of survival rates and numbers of returning adults. We need to know what are those impacts, for both hatchery and wild stocks. [It was agreed to ask Hans Radke for clarification as to what exactly his information needs are on this issue].
- ? 4. Estimates – Provisionary Fish – DREW is leaning toward a simple, benchmark approach, where the estimates of adults escapement would be needed over five-year

increments. If annual escapement estimates are available, these data would be helpful.

? 5. Allocation – The A-Fish team needs to meet with fish managers to decide how best to allocate returning adults to fisheries (Tribal, commercial, recreational and by location). The current thinking is to use mid-1980s pre-ESA allocations for the base case. Then meet with fish managers on designing harvest patterns for outyears 24, 48 and 100. [It was agreed that Hans Radke will take the lead on this effort].

Another issue that will need to be addressed is future dependence on hatchery operations.

The group spent a few minutes discussing the details of the PATH analytical process, the informational outputs it will be producing in the coming months, the uncertainties bounding those outputs and how those outputs fit in with DREW's information needs. In response to a question, Marmorek observed that, while many in the region may not like the range of uncertainty that will be attached to the PATH analyses, those uncertainties are a consequence of the limitations of both historical and current scientific evidence, and the region is going to have to live with them.

The group discussed the need for a broader, multi-species approach to the analytical process, rather than one that is focused solely on listed Snake River species. The DPCG has recently made the recommendation that what is needed in support of the 1999 decision is for us to look at these information needs in a broader context and scope, Sheets said. It isn't going to play out very well if, in 1999, the decision-makers stand up in front of the press and say, "Here's our plan for three of the listed stocks," said Sheets -- the obvious first question will be, "What about all the rest of the stocks?" With that in mind, how do we expand our approach to include more of the species of concern?

Before we talk about expanding anyone's focus, said Marmorek, perhaps we should discuss what PATH is going to be generating, and how that fits in with the information needs DREW has identified. In terms of Need 1, Boundary Estimates, what we're generating is a range of estimates, for any given management action, of the mainstem and tributary harvest rate that would exist, for spring/summer chinook only. For fall chinook, we had anticipated that we would generate a harvest rate which depends upon the returns in a given year, Marmorek said.

After some minutes of discussion, Sheets observed that it appears fair to say that the fall chinook analysis will potentially have the biggest effect on DREW's anadromous fish work group, and it's certainly important to the tribal circumstances work group. Others suggested that spring/summer chinook are potentially the biggest component of wild fish in the basin, and the most important to the recreational fishery.

The topic reverted to the details of the PATH analytical analysis. After a few minutes, Tom Cooney of WDFW observed that there appears to be a disconnect between expectation and reality. I'm hearing that the PATH representatives are trying to explain what information that may be useful to DREW has been generated to date, so that DREW can get started on its economic analysis, he said. What we're suggesting, Cooney continued, is that, using the ranges contained in PATH's preliminary spring/summer chinook report, DREW should be able to

generate some starting points that, in the end, would encompass where the weighting process will take us. Personally, said Cooney, I think that weighting process is going to narrow down the range. However, what I think I've heard the DREW folks saying is that they need the final results from PATH before they can do anything. I appreciate your desire to have PATH produce single-point estimates for each action, Cooney said, but that isn't going to happen. That report hasn't been released yet, replied Phil Meyer of CRITFC -- maybe once we've seen it, our comfort level with what you're suggesting will increase. We will talk to the IT about releasing the report as soon as possible, Marmorek said.

Sheets suggested that it might be useful to hear some specifics about how the individual DREW work groups will be using the information from PATH. Shannen Davis of The Research Group (a Foster-Wheeler contractor) distributed copies of a recent study looking at the economic importance of hatchery coho and chinook salmon in Oregon; this document is attached as Enclosure E. The bottom line, he said, is that, at least for the kinds of analysis we're doing, the level of detail that is being produced in the PATH process is probably far more than we need to give good economic information to the Corps for their decisionmaking. The uncertainties we have been discussing are certainly important, he said, but mainly, we need to know orders of magnitude. We are willing to work with whatever information you can give us within the constraints of confidentiality, Davis said, so that we can proceed with our task.

The group spent a few minutes discussing the intricacies of PATH's harvest rate and other fisheries-related assumptions; ultimately, Marmorek said that it is good to hear that, for this component of the DREW analysis, at least, it looks as though the PATH outputs will be sufficient.

Meyer then spent a few minutes discussing the efforts of DREW's tribal circumstances work group. At the conclusion of Meyer's presentation, Marmorek asked whether the PATH outputs he has described will provide enough of what Meyer's work group needs. My understanding is that a lot of your probability analyses are based on 50 years of data, that there is tremendous variability within those 50 years, and that generates the frequency with which you hit escapement thresholds and your probability of recoveries, said Meyer. If that's the case, if we take a benchmark approach, rather than a probability approach, the probability issue may be less problematic for our blunt instrument than it is for your fine-tuned instrument.

There is also the uncertainty associated with future management actions, said Howard Schaller -- I think it may be a little more complicated than the way you've characterized it. That's the first part of the question, said Meyer. Overall, I think that once we have a chance to see PATH's preliminary report, the data I've heard so far may become more understandable and more useful. However, I would like to have an opportunity to discuss that report with the A-Fish team before making any judgements about the adequacy of the information you're providing, Meyer said.

Another DREW meeting participant observed that, while the 1999 decision will probably come down to a choice between drawdown and maximized transportation, in the end, there are going to be alternative interpretations of the results of PATH's analysis of those two options. We don't want to pretend we're biologists, and try to interpret what you're telling us, he said -- we want you to tell us what you think the evidence indicates. Just to clarify this point, said Marmorek, once we do our weight-of-evidence analysis, that's still not going to say FLUSH is 100% right and CRiSP is 100% wrong. Eventually, we do intend to come up with some

expected values given the probabilities of the various alternatives, but that's not going to answer everyone's questions.

After a few minutes of further discussion, Schaller suggested that it would probably be useful to schedule another meeting between PATH and DREW once the DREW membership has had an opportunity to review PATH's preliminary spring/summer chinook report – I think we would be in a much better position to have a meaningful discussion about the PATH outputs once DREW has actually read that report, he said.

Sheets summarized the discussion so far by saying that, at least for DREW information need #1, as soon as the PATH preliminary report is available for review, DREW will review it; another PATH/DREW meeting will be scheduled at that time. It was asked that PATH begin to think about how to define probable boundaries, in preparation for that meeting. Schaller observed that, also in the context of Need 1, PATH is not currently planning to produce information on projected adult returns. We need information about harvestable adult returns, said Meyer – if you're not able to provide that information directly, then you need to provide ratios that will allow us to get from what you are giving us -- escapements -- to where we need to be, which is catch.

For the seven index stocks, we will have estimates, in five-year increments, of numbers of spawners, estimates of the harvest rates on each stock, and estimates of total harvest, Marmorek said. It sounds like it's an extrapolation problem, Meyer said. But if we can't get to the number of adult fish caught, none of our economic calculations can be made – it's that simple.

For the Snake River index stocks, you will have some harvest numbers, but those will be the only harvest numbers we'll be generating, Marmorek said. We will also have the harvest rates, which you can use, working with fisheries managers, to do all sorts of things.

The group continued on through the list of DREW information needs, making a variety of wording changes. These changes have been captured on the list above; please see the list on page 3 of Enclosure D for the original wording.

Do the DREW participants feel more comfortable that we at least have a plan to address their concerns? Sheets asked. Yes, Meyer replied – I think we've done good work today, in beginning to talk with one another on the issues, and our comfort level will increase once we resolve those issues.

One final thing, said Sheets – we will get some indication – perhaps as early as tomorrow – on the release time for the PATH preliminary report. Once the report has been released, and the PATH participants have a chance to define probable boundaries, what is the right time frame for us to meet again? Phil Meyer suggested that one option would be to provide DREW with the report prior to its general release, under an understanding of confidentiality, in order for this work to proceed with all possible speed. It was so agreed, pending approval at tomorrow's IT meeting. After some minutes of discussion, it was agreed to convene another PATH/DREW meeting on Tuesday, April 7.

IV. Next Steps.

Sheets distributed Enclosure F, a slightly revised draft of the DPCG's "Recommendations for a Process for Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Restoration Decisions," dated March 3, 1998. He noted that the "Next Steps" section had been moved up to the "Summary of Recommendations" section, and that these "Next Steps" have been modified based on IT input. There are no other substantive changes to this draft, he added (the "Next Steps" section is found on Page 4 of Enclosure F).

Sheets invited the other DPCG participants to provide comments on this document, in preparation for the March 26 Executive Committee meeting. In particular, he drew the group's attention to Point 1 of this section, which calls for a broad review by interested parties and a process to develop a regional consensus on the decision process, including goals, scope, criteria and information needs. I thought it would be useful for this group to spend a few minutes discussing how best to accomplish that, in the event that the same question occurs to the EC, Sheets said.

Does this group have more detailed thoughts about how we may want to operationalize any of these "Next Steps"? Sheets asked. One thought, said Marmorek – we're doing the best job we can of providing a rigorous, quantitative assessment of spring/summer chinook, and a somewhat less-detailed assessment of fall chinook and steelhead – if you want to stick to the 1999 schedule, and also have detailed evaluations of stocks like Hanford Reach fall chinook and Mid-Columbia chinook, that implies a lot of work in a very short period of time, particularly in the context of DREW's needs.

My understanding was that PATH was going to give us some indication of the effects of various alternatives on Upper Columbia and Lower Columbia stocks, Sheets replied. We do intend to look at Lower Columbia spring/summer chinook stocks, and it's not a huge task to project what their numbers might be, Marmorek replied. However, we have to be clear on the fact that what PATH can actually be expected to accomplish in this time-frame is fairly restrictive.

After some minutes, Sheets asked whether these three "Next Steps" questions are appropriate, and, if not, is there another, more qualified group to formulate these questions? Do we need to talk about this some more at our next meeting, or should we just drop this question, which may well involve expanding the decision process beyond the listed Snake River species?

COE's Greg Graham suggested that the latter course may be the most expeditious – I will tell you right now that the Corps has blinders on in terms of the 1999 decision, he said. And it's not multi-species, ecosystem-related. We're already struggling with where we are right now, with the alternatives that are on the table – we're talking about narrowing the scope of the 1999 decision, not broadening it, Graham said. We're talking about how to get to a 1999 decision that is legally defensible, so we're not dealing with these broader issues, in spite of the fact that I, personally, feel that it would be a good idea.

After the briefing on the 19th, I had to report back to my boss, said another participant. I reported that PATH is behind schedule, and that that may or may not be a problem – they're looking at a limited number of alternatives – three, for spring/summer chinook. There are actually nine alternatives, but PATH has no schedule for looking at nine alternatives, that I am aware of, he said. That may not be a problem, but here's the problem, from my perspective – we have a large degree of uncertainty, and I don't know what's that's going to do to the analyses.

My boss's reply was that the Corps is going to make the 1999 decision, one way or another – we're committed to that. That being the case, what are our options here? he asked. To me, the biology is the critical piece to making this decision – if you can't provide some certainty on the biology, it's going to be pretty tough to make a regional decision in 1999.

One answer, as far as how to maximize the amount you learn while minimizing the risk to the stocks, is experimental management, Marmorek replied. One experiment may be to draw down some dams, because the only way you'll ever know the ultimate effects of that option may be to do it.

The group spent a few minutes discussing the priorities for future PATH analysis, focusing in particular on the maximized in-river option. Ultimately, Sheets suggested that it would probably be more productive to continue this dialogue once everyone has had a chance to review PATH's preliminary spring/summer chinook report. Personally, I would like to have a fairly intensive discussion of whatever insights, questions and observations that may arise as a result of that review, he said. Is there additional information that we could generate, either through PATH or some other group, that will inform the decisionmaking process? We need to come to grips with what PATH will and will not tell us, and, in the context of the decision process, ask ourselves what else we can do to provide the information needed, Sheets said.

Sheets asked the DPCG to think about the "Next Steps" section of the "Recommendations" document, with the goal of discussing them in more detail at the group's next meeting. I think we also need to revisit the topic of priorities and alternatives, he added, as well as the PATH/DREW connection.

V. Next DPCG Meeting and Agenda Items.

The next meeting of the Decision Process Coordinating Group was set for Tuesday, April 7 from 10:30 to 4 p.m. Meeting notes prepared by Jeff Kuechle, BPA contractor.